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ABSTRACT

The first section of this pamphlet discusses factors that influence reading interest, such as age, sex, grade level, exposure to books, availability of printed materials, reading ability, identity, and reward. The second section offers such suggestions for stimulating interest in reading as knowing your child, being aware of your example, encouraging wide reading, encouraging library visits, guiding your child's ability to scan, being a good listener, being willing to share, and providing reading-related activities (story writing, reading games, role playing, and story comparisons). The final section offers a list of books for children and for adults who are interested in helping children to read. (TS)

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How can I encourage my primary-grade child to read?

Unfortunately not all children nearing the termination of their third-grade experience possess the same enthusiasm for reading that they did upon their hopeful entry into first grade. Perhaps the early enthusiasm results from the young child's observation of parents, brothers and sisters, older friends, or even people on the television screen glancing at a printed page and then reacting in a happy, aggravated, or excited manner. Perhaps it results from the young child's many pleasant personal experiences with picture books or with stories read aloud. In any case, it may be difficult for the child to relate these early emotional experiences with printed materials to his classroom reading group experience. One cannot easily become highly excited about, "Oh, Look! See Dick run!"

However, all is not lost! Schools are experimenting with many approaches to reading instruction, primarily in an attempt to maintain the child's interest in printed material. Also, you as a parent probably wish

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An ERIC/CRIER + IRA Micromonograph
by Molly Kayes Ransbury

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to become involved in encouraging his interest in reading. This article is intended to help you do this by identifying some things that influence his reading interest and also by suggesting ways that you can build upon these influences.

Factors that influence reading interest

People involved in reading education have found that there are several factors which greatly influence reading interest. If you relate these to your own child, they might help you to understand why he feels as he does about reading.

Age. It is obvious to you, the parent of a primary-grade child, that the years from three to six constitute a period of rapid language growth. The child asks a voluminous number of questions, and he usually enjoys playing with words. Moreover, this is an age of much activity involving several centers of interest: the child himself, his real world, and his imaginary world. These particular characteristics offer an excellent opportunity for piquing the child's interest in print through the selection of interest-related materials. Stories and poems containing rhyming words, repetition, characters of the child's own age, fun things to

feel, and bright colors are especially appealing to this age group. Any book, however, should be rather brief so that the child does not tire of a story which seemingly drones on forever.

The child from six to nine is moving rapidly toward "adult behavior." He is developing his own values and opinions. One way for him to accomplish this growth is to learn the skills of communication. No longer are bright colors, fuzzy-feeling pages, and cute little verses entirely captivating. Also, stories can be longer and more involved due to the increased attention span and intellectual maturity of the primary-school child. The six- to nine-year-old seeks stories which involve a moral: the villain gets his just punishment or the long-suffering heroine is finally rewarded. In addition, this child's increasing awareness of himself in relation to his expanding world of new school friends, helpful adults, and sundry crawly animals stimulates his interest in stories dealing with justice, humor, peer relationships, exotic animals, and physical growth and development.

Fortunately, knowledge of children's interests and abilities has produced an excellent blend of the two

in books of high interest, low-reading level designed for the early elementary child. How wonderful when the child can select a book he can read himself and laugh aloud over the adventures of some perfectly captivating silly cat or a strange zoo animal.

Sex. In the past, some people believed that there was little difference between the reading interest areas of



boys and girls until age nine. However, recent studies indicate that the number of hours children spend engaged in viewing television has caused an earlier diversification in the types of activities that appeal to boys and girls. From infancy, boys are exposed to television sports events; they also begin to play organized sports at age eight. Therefore, even at the age of seven they may well be seeking baseball or football stories. On the other hand, little girls watch television cartoons about teenage girls: they love the adventures of Josie in *Josie and the Pussycats*. They also begin their own "adventures." At age seven they enter Brownies and begin working toward badges that run the gamut of activities, from camping to home-making, thus the selection of books dealing with how-to-do-it for beginners could strongly appeal to young ladies of this age.

Boys' toys encourage interest in space, sports, science, and television adventure heroes; girls play with teenage dolls, beauty equipment, and other feminine toys; therefore, the diversification of reading interests may well begin as early as age six or seven. A rule of thumb for book selection might be that reading interests usually follow play and social interests.

In any case, it is important to remember that all children's interests do not diverge this early nor do they all follow these patterns. For example, many girls continue to be interested in sports, science, and adventure along with, or rather than, homemaking and teenage-girl activities, and many boys are great do-it-yourselfers. Such varying interests as these should not be deemed "inappropriate" for either boys or girls. Today's society allows for individual differences rather than forces boys and girls into sex role stereotypes, and today's parents should allow their children to read books that appeal to their natural interests rather than preselecting ones that fit the interests termed "appropriate" for boys or "appropriate" for girls. Children will refine their own interests as their self-identity matures and as their experiences broaden.

Grade level. Grade level is external to the child, but it is extremely important. Naturally the child's exposure to specific content in different subjects and at different grade levels in school tends to affect his reading interests. For example, if a third-grade child is pondering the solar system in his science class, he

might enjoy some leisure reading on this topic. However, there is another ramification of grade level that must be dealt with by you as a parent. That is, you must be careful not to insist that your child read only books written at his present grade level. For instance, if he is in the third grade, it does not necessarily follow that he must read only third-grade level books.

Perhaps the easiest way to ascertain the appropriateness of a leisure reading book is to encourage your child to read a few lines. If he misses fewer than one word in twenty, he probably will be able to read the book to himself. Some third graders might enjoy reading a sixth-grade book while some might be more comfortable in a first-grade book. Ask yourself, "Do I always read books that challenge my reading capability?" I would venture to say that your answer is a negative one. Allow your child to read whatever is comfortable for him. You will probably find that his interest and confidence in himself as a reader grows.

Exposure to books. Generally, the rule is that the more a young child is exposed to reading-related activities, the greater will be his interest in reading.

However, it is essential that the word "pleasurable" be inserted before "reading-related activities." Reading aloud to your child and providing books for "browsing" are two obvious reading-related activities. However, don't overlook television as another source for stimulating the young by introducing them to some perfectly delightful books. A followup trip to the library to select a book introduced on television might be a great adventure as well as a reading-related activity for the child.

Availability of printed materials. Obviously a child's interest in reading will be inhibited if there is no book available for him to hold, touch, and read. Encouraging respect for books is important, but books are replaceable, and caring for them should not be so rule-directed that touching them is accompanied by an overriding fear of tearing or soiling a page. Since there are so many types of reading materials available, it is not necessary that your child possess only hard cover books. Other less expensive, easily replaced types are excellent for a child's own library. A combination of hard cover books, soft cover books, magazines, and even newspapers offers a variety of knowledge and freedom of use. Regardless of what

type you choose, you should make a conscious effort to supply your child with some form of reading material and ideally a very special place to keep his books.

Reading ability. It is extremely important that you as a parent understand the difference between your child's instructional reading level and his independent reading level. The instructional level is the one at which a child reads to develop his reading skill; in other words, it is the one at which your child's school instructional program is planned. His independent level, on the other hand, is usually thought to be as much as one full grade level below his instructional level. This independent level is the one at which he can read without teacher or parent assistance and the one at which he should generally be reading during his leisure reading hours. A discussion with your child's teacher will provide specific information as to what his instructional and independent reading levels are and will offer guidance in book selection.

Identity. A wise parent will be able to provide his child with books that help him to better understand himself in relation to his world. At times a child finds it much easier to face his own problems by reading

about a particular story character that has experienced some of the same situations.

Reward. A child's interest in reading, as in anything else, will develop most fully if he finds satisfaction in the experience. This satisfaction may come through your praise, through personal enrichment such as new knowledge, better self-awareness, and greater tolerance of others, or through an emotional release that reading can offer. As a parent you can help to guide your child to the realization of the rewards that reading has to offer.

Suggestions for stimulating interest

Some factors that influence reading interest have been enumerated for you so that you might better understand the kinds of things that stimulate your child's reading interest. Now let's use an understanding of these factors to suggest ways you can encourage this interest.

Know your child. Did something very interesting happen to your child today? What five things would your child say truly excite him? Does your child have a particular concern that is troubling him? If you are

able to answer these questions, you show an understanding of your child as a person with particular needs, tastes, and interests, and you are well on your way to capably guiding him in the selection of interesting reading material. If, however, you cannot answer these questions, why not begin finding out what your child is like before you try to stimulate a lasting interest in reading?

Be aware of your example. If you enjoy reading, you are probably serving as a model that your child will follow. However, even if you do not consider yourself to be a "reader," you can let your child know that you think reading is a worthwhile activity for him by praising him for his reading efforts and by encouraging him to use reading as a tool for seeking answers to his questions. Also you might spend some time reading to him. This will stimulate his interest in printed material and will indirectly let him know that you feel reading is a valuable activity.

Encourage wide reading. There is an abundance of printed materials today—books adapted from television series, television series based upon books, soft-covered books accompanied by recordings, chil-

dren's magazines, comic books, classics, folk tales, newspapers for children, easy-to-read books, books filled with factual information, and tempting picture books. All of these are possible sources of stimulating reading for your child. No longer are "the classics" the only acceptable form of reading, so encourage the use of as many types of printed materials as possible.

Encourage library visits. Nor is the library any longer primarily a place to protect books. The children's librarian is knowledgeable and a source of very valuable information concerning the selection of books. She has books, records, films, filmstrips, recorded tapes, and story hours to offer. Take your child to the library. Encourage him to go on his own. He can find a whole new pleasant world of experience there, and you can find a great financial aid. You will no longer need to purchase *all* of the books your child reads.

Guide your child's ability to scan. Often a child selects a book because it has an attractive cover or because it is about a particularly interesting subject, only to become discouraged by the difficulty or the simplicity of the reading material when he sits down to read. Before your child makes a final selection,

you should encourage him to open the book to three or four different pages and attempt to read a few lines. If he finds the reading too difficult, too easy, or boring, he should try to find another more suitable book that "fits" his interest and reading ability.

Be a good listener. Reading is a form of communication. When a child reads, he is trying to understand a message from the author. It is the opinion of many reading educators that if a child is understanding the printed message, it is not absolutely necessary that he read every word—when reading either silently or aloud. If he omits a word, or if he substitutes a perfectly appropriate word as he reads to you, I would encourage you as a parent-listener not to say, "You skipped *the*, go back and read that sentence again!" What a perfect way to take the fun out of reading. Even the professional actor or speaker will read a passage silently for meaning before attempting to master the text in a "word perfect" fashion, so why expect a child to be "word perfect?" Relax and enjoy his reading effort.

Be willing to share. Today so many demands are made on our time that leisure reading sometimes

becomes lost in the rush. However, you should try to arrange time for both you and your child to read and to share your reading experiences. This time might be a special hour or half hour before bedtime when both of you read independently, or when you read to him or he reads to you. On the other hand, actual reading need not always be attempted during this special time. Instead you might wish to use it to encourage discussions of some of your favorite childhood stories or of some character, plot, or author that your child wishes to share.



If you are a family that prefers spontaneity, you need not establish a specific time to share reading, but I would recommend that you try to fit it into your life if you wish to encourage your child to read. Remember, even if you have an extremely active life, there is no reason why reading experiences cannot be shared during a fishing trip or while doing the dishes, gardening, or relaxing at the beach. Shared reading experiences are a stimulus for further reading experiences, so cultivate them wisely.

Provide reading-related activities: Story telling. I hope you have had the enchanting experience of being told a story by a parent, a teacher, a camp counselor, or a friend. Do you remember the sheer delight of sitting in a dark room and telling ghost stories or the beautiful experience of listening to the adventures of your grandmother when she first arrived in America? I still feel a warm glow when I think of sitting next to my grandfather and having him make up all kinds of wonderful tales about the pictures in his *National Geographic*.

Stories need not be of great high adventure, nor do they always need to come from a book. Children still

love to be told stories of funny things that happened to you when you were young, of interesting ancestors, or of the colorful neighbor who lived down the block. There is no feeling that is quite the same as sharing the intimate bond of a story-telling experience. And please don't forget that children love to tell stories as well as to hear them. Allowing your child such an opportunity provides both entertainment and a wonderful way to gain further insight into him as a person.

Reading related activity: Story writing. You might try to write a short story using your child as a central character. Perhaps one day he might have the adventures of a hippie, or a popular rock singer, or a sports hero. Children not only delight in seeing themselves in print, but also they enjoy knowing how you can project them into different roles. One note of caution: when doing this, try to make the words those that your child can read easily.

Another twist on this idea is to write a diary of experiences that you and your child have shared. Perhaps taking a trip to the zoo or the museum or watching a television special on ecology might be the basis for the diary entry.



Reading related activity: Reading games. You might play guessing games involving story characters, titles, or plots. For example, "I am thinking of a story character who had golden curls, was very hungry, and fell asleep in a very strange house." This experience not only will encourage reading and story telling, but also it will help your child to synthesize story plot.

Reading related activity: Role playing. Children often like to role play. So you might wish to try pantomiming a particular story line. Perhaps after

reading an especially interesting book, you and your family might take character roles and act out without the use of words the events that occurred in the story.

Reading related activity: Story type comparisons.

Some children really enjoy folktales. Your local library has folktale books from many lands. It might be fun to read and compare the folktales and legends of one country with those of another. For example, if you compare those of Russia with those of Spain, you will find that the folklore from these two countries is very different; that from Russia tends to deal with princes and magical happenings, while that from Spain is very earthy and provincial in character.

Numerous ideas designed to stimulate your child's reading interests have been offered above; as a conclusion it seems appropriate to include two more things for your information. They are a bibliography of books for children and a resource bibliography for those of you who wish to read more about your primary-grade child's interest in books. Therefore, two short selected bibliographies follow. One final word: if you care enough about your child to have

read this far, you child is lucky to have you for a parent.

Some Questions for Thought and Discussion

How do a child's age, sex, and grade level affect interest in reading?

How can a parent best expose his child to books and encourage broad and frequent reading?

What is the difference between a child's instructional reading level and his independent reading level? Why should a parent understand this difference?

How can the parent-child relationship affect reading? Consider the parent as a person who cares, as a guide to good reading and reading materials, as an example, as a good listener, and as a fellow reader.

Why is it important that a child learn how to shop for books?

What opportunities exist for a parent to develop a story-telling, story-writing, story-swapping relationship with a child?

What kind of game-type activities can be built around reading to create interest? Other than the examples mentioned in this micromonograph, how many can you think of?

How does your home rate as a place where a young child will develop an avid interest in reading?

Here are some reading suggestions

Books for children

Bishop, Claire Huchet. *Five Chinese Brothers.* (New York: Coward and McCann, 1938.)

Burton, Virginia Lee. *The Little House.* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1942.)

Craig, M. Jean. *Boxes.* (New York: Norton, 1964.)

Etchemendy, Teje. *Tales of Old Russia.* (New York: Rand McNally, 1964.)

Holland, John. *The Way It Is.* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1967.)

Horvath, Betty. *Jasper Makes Music.* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1967.)

Krasilovsky, Phyllis. *The Man Who Didn't Wash His Dishes.* (New York: Doubleday, 1950.)

McCoskey, Robert. *Make Way For Ducklings.* (New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1967.)

Minarik, Else Holmelund. *Little Bear.* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957.)

for you and your child

Sendak, Maurice. *Where the Wild Things Are*. (New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1969.)

Seras, Dr. pseud. (Theodor S. Geisel). *The Cat in the Hat*. (New York: Random House, 1957.)

Books for parents

Arbuthnot, May Hill; Clark, Margaret; and Long, Harriet. *Children's Books too Good to Miss*. (Cleveland: Western Reserve University Press, 1966.)

Lists and annotates over 200 titles of outstanding reading material for children. Classifies entries as to appropriate age group and type of book.

Currah, Ann. *Best Books for Children*. (New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1970.)

Publishes annually over 4,000 titles arranged by grade levels and subject. Indicates books which are recommended by the American Library Association.

Dalglish, Alice and Duff, Annis. *Aides to Choosing Books for Your Children*. (New York: Children's Book Council, Revised Frequently, \$0.15 each.)

Lists books and booklists about children's reading materials.

Larrick, Nancy. A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading. (New York: Doubleday, 1969.) Suggests appropriate titles for children at each stage of their development. Includes information concerning poetry, television, and comics.

Recommended Children's Books of (Current Year). (Reprinted from the School Library Journal, New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1971.)

Presents an annual listing of the "best" of children's literature for the designated year. Evaluates approximately 1,000 titles each issue.

The International Reading Association attempts, through its publications, to provide a forum for a wide spectrum of opinion on reading. This policy permits divergent viewpoints without assuming the endorsement of the Association.

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